

Washington, D.C. – Today, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) voted to pass the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2010. The legislation aims to improve the quality of life for military personnel and their families and to increase the amount of assistance that the VA can offer to the men and women who have defended our nation. The bill (HR 3082), which provides \$133.7 billion in funding, 5% more than current levels, includes \$7.2 billion in economic stimulus money and passed by a 415-3 margin. The bill now awaits Senate approval and the President's signature before becoming law.

"It is our moral obligation to ensure that the men and women who wore the cloth of this nation receive the best possible treatment for themselves and their families," said Congressman Sestak. "This legislation recognizes areas that require improvement and provides critical funds to meet these needs, including billions of dollars for military housing and resources that will allow the VA to offer more medical services to more Veterans, particularly in the area of mental health care."

A key highlight of the bill is its provision to supply advanced funding for VA health programs for the first time by providing \$48.2 billion for FY 2011. This will allow for better planning and predictability for the VA and is a measure that was strongly advocated for by Veterans' organizations. Congressman Sestak earlier this year co-sponsored a bill that called for such advance funding. The bill also adds an additional \$533 million to expand eligibility to an estimated 266,000 "Priority 8" Veterans," an effort championed and started by Congressman Sestak to restore benefits denied by the Administration in 2003 to middle class and lower income Veterans who often have trouble affording health care.

Congressman Sestak, who served 31 years in the Navy and achieved the status of a 3-star Admiral, has advocated strongly for Veterans in his district and across the country. The Congressman recently hosted his third Veterans Summit, bringing together local and regional VA officials and VA Chief of Staff John Gingrich to hear from 500 Veterans and their families. The event highlighted the necessity of continued improvements in the way that the VA administers its benefits. HR 3082 directly addresses some of the raised concerns by including a 10% increase in the amount appropriated for managing and administering healthcare, a 21% increase in funding for medical facilities, and a 30% increase in funding for VA automated technology.

"There are over 54,000 Veterans in the 7th Congressional district and over 15 million nationwide. I am determined to see that each is aware of the benefits to which they are entitled

and uses every one of them to full effect,” said the Congressman. “Even today my office works with WWII and Korean War Veterans who fought in combat but, for a variety of reasons, never enrolled in the VA Medical system following their service. Tragically, due to policy decisions of 2003—while our nation was at war no less—hundreds of thousands of lower-income Veterans were locked out of the care they need and deserve. The spouses and children of our nation’s servicemen and women now face the multi-generational challenge of finding and paying for the expensive care their loved ones need.”

The Congressman added, “I am especially proud of the continued efforts to restore health care benefits to our Priority 8 Veterans. Following our 2008 Veterans Summit, Chairman Filner and I worked to find \$375 million to enroll some of these “Priority 8” lower-income Veterans in the VA medical system—but more needs to be done. This bill will allow an additional estimated 266,000 Priority 8 Veterans to get the health care benefits they deserve.”

The FY 2010 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act also makes key investments in the following areas, among other actions:

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:** \$108.9 billion, the same as the President’s Request and \$14.5 billion above 2009, for Veterans medical care, claims processors, and facility improvements. In addition, \$48.2 billion is provided in advance appropriations for FY 2011 for three medical accounts: medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities.

**Veterans Health Administration (VHA):** \$45.1 billion, the same as the President’s Request and \$4.4 billion above 2009 after adjusting for transfers approved by the Committee on January 6, 2009, for Veterans medical care. The Veterans Health Administration estimates that they will treat more than 6.1 million patients in 2010 including more than 419,000 Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan (56,000 more than 2010).

**Medical Services:** \$34.7 billion, the same as the President’s Request and \$4.0 billion above 2009 after adjusting for approved transfers, to improve access to medical services for all Veterans.

**Mental Health:** \$4.6 billion, the same as the President’s Request and \$800 million above 2009, for mental health care.

**Assistance for Homeless Vets:** \$3.2 billion, the same as the President’s Request and \$949 million above 2009, includes \$26 million for a Presidential Initiative to combat homelessness, \$150 million for the homeless grants and per diem program, \$20 million for supportive services for low income Veterans and families, in addition to \$21 million to hire additional personnel for the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program.

**Rural Health:** The Department estimates that \$440 million will be spent in FY 2010 on innovative practices to improve access to care for Veterans in rural areas. More than 3.2 million (41%) of enrolled Veterans live in rural or highly rural areas.

Medical Support and Compliance: \$4.9 billion, \$200 million below the President's Request and \$450 million above 2009, to ensure the efficient operation of the Department's health care system.

Medical Facilities: \$4.9 billion, \$200 million above the President's Request and \$136 million below 2009, for non-recurring maintenance at existing VA facilities to address identified shortfalls and to ensure the Department's facilities remain capable of delivering world class medicine.

Medical and Prosthetic Research: \$580 million, the same as the President's Request and \$70 million above 2009, for medical and prosthetic research related to Veterans health, including a \$48 million increase for research to address the critical needs of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom Veterans.

Major and Minor Construction: \$1.9 billion, \$127 million above the President's Request and \$256 million above 2009. Major construction funding of \$1.2 billion will enable the Department to implement the recommendations made by the Capitol Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission, which was established to look at facilities and determine their construction needs. The increase in minor construction will enable the Department to complete approximately 100 projects in 2010.

Extended Care Facilities: \$85 million, the same as the President's Request and \$90 million below 2009, for grants to states for construction and renovation of extended care facilities. States must provide 35% of the cost, while the Department pays the other 65%.

General Operating Expenses: \$2.1 billion, \$135 million below the President's Request and \$287 million above 2009, to enable the Department to hire roughly 1,200 additional claims processors to continue to work down the backlog of benefits claims and to reduce the time to process new claims. The most recent VA quarterly status report estimates that nearly 397,000 claims are pending.

Information Technology: \$3.3 billion, the same as the President's Request and \$558.9 million above 2009 after adjusting for transfers approved by the Committee on January 6, 2009. New initiatives in 2010 include paperless benefits processing and improvements in electronic health records.

Inspector General: \$107 million, the same as the President's Request and \$19.2 million above 2009, to provide additional oversight personnel, including initiatives regarding financial audit and information technology program reviews.

**MILITARY CONSTRUCTION:** \$24.6 billion, \$226 million above the President's Request and \$472 million below 2009, including \$1.4 billion for Overseas Contingency Operations. The decrease from 2009 is attributable to the expected decline in BRAC construction requirements and the success of the family housing privatization program.

Trainee Troop Housing Initiative: \$450 million to accelerate the Army's program to modernize troop housing facilities for trainees. The Army has a need for \$2.2 billion to bring all 115,413 trainee barracks spaces up to standard and the program currently is not scheduled to finish until 2017.

Guard and Reserve Initiative: \$200 million in additional funding is provided for Army National Guard, Air National Guard, Army Reserve, Navy and Marine Corps Reserve, and Air Force Reserve construction to address critical unfunded requirements, in recognition of the

tremendous contributions made by Guard and Reserve personnel to emergency assistance, homeland security, and national defense.

BRAC 1990 Environmental Cleanup: \$537 million, \$140 million above the President's Request and \$78 million above 2009, to address the large unfunded backlog of environmental cleanup for bases that were closed during the four previous BRAC rounds.

2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and Re-stationing: \$7.5 billion, same as the President's request, to implement base closures and realignments, and support the re-stationing of troops and their families from overseas to the United States.

Military Housing: \$2 billion, same as the President's Request, to continue eliminating inadequate military housing.

Overseas Contingency Operations: \$1.4 billion to support additional military construction requirements to support operations and troop increases in Afghanistan.

### RELATED AGENCIES:

American Battle Monuments Commission: \$61.8 million, \$1.5 million above the President's Request and \$2.3 million above 2009. This funding provides for the care and operation of our military monuments and cemeteries around the world.

United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims: \$27.1 million, the same as the President's Request and \$3.8 million below 2009, which included \$7 million in one-time costs for the planning and design of a new facility.

Cemeterial Expenses: \$42.5 million, \$5.3 million above the President's Request and \$5.8 million above 2009, for Arlington cemetery. The additional funding will enable relocation of power and telephone lines to make ground available for over 8,000 additional gravesites.

Armed Forces Retirement Home: \$134 million, the same as the President's Request and \$71 million above 2009, for the Armed Forces Retirement Home, including \$72 million for capital expenditures.

### IMPORTANT POLICY ITEMS

Advanced VA Healthcare Funding: The bill provides advance appropriations for FY 2011 for three medical accounts: medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities, to ensure timely and predictable funding for the Veterans health care system.

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including as Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government*

*from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*